

# THE AIR WE BREATHE—APPROACHES TO REDUCING SMOG IN CENTRAL OHIO: an example of a framed issue

## APPROACH 1

### **STRONG STANDARDS, TOUGH ENFORCEMENT**

*Set high standards, increase monitoring, and punish violators.*

A system of regulations is the most fair of any and achieves the greatest results. We need to reduce emissions further by strengthening regulations and their enforcement.

#### ***In Support***

- Requiring every company to meet certain standards means that no one will face a competitive disadvantage.
- Actions to reduce pollution are often difficult, and many people and businesses will not do what is necessary voluntarily.
- The certainty of a new standard can stimulate innovations necessary to achieve it.
- Pollution is an example of the free market not working perfectly. Regulations often are the only way to protect the public interest.

#### ***In Opposition***

- Regulations often are imposed arbitrarily. Many find ways to circumvent them.
- The regulatory approach interferes with free market operations and stifles the kind of innovations that would better solve pollution problems in the long run.
- The heavy hand of government is a dangerous affront to our personal freedom.
- Businesses and individuals respond very negatively to an abundance of regulation.

## APPROACH 2

### **INCENTIVES AND INVESTMENTS**

*Invest in solutions; reward those who make a positive difference.*

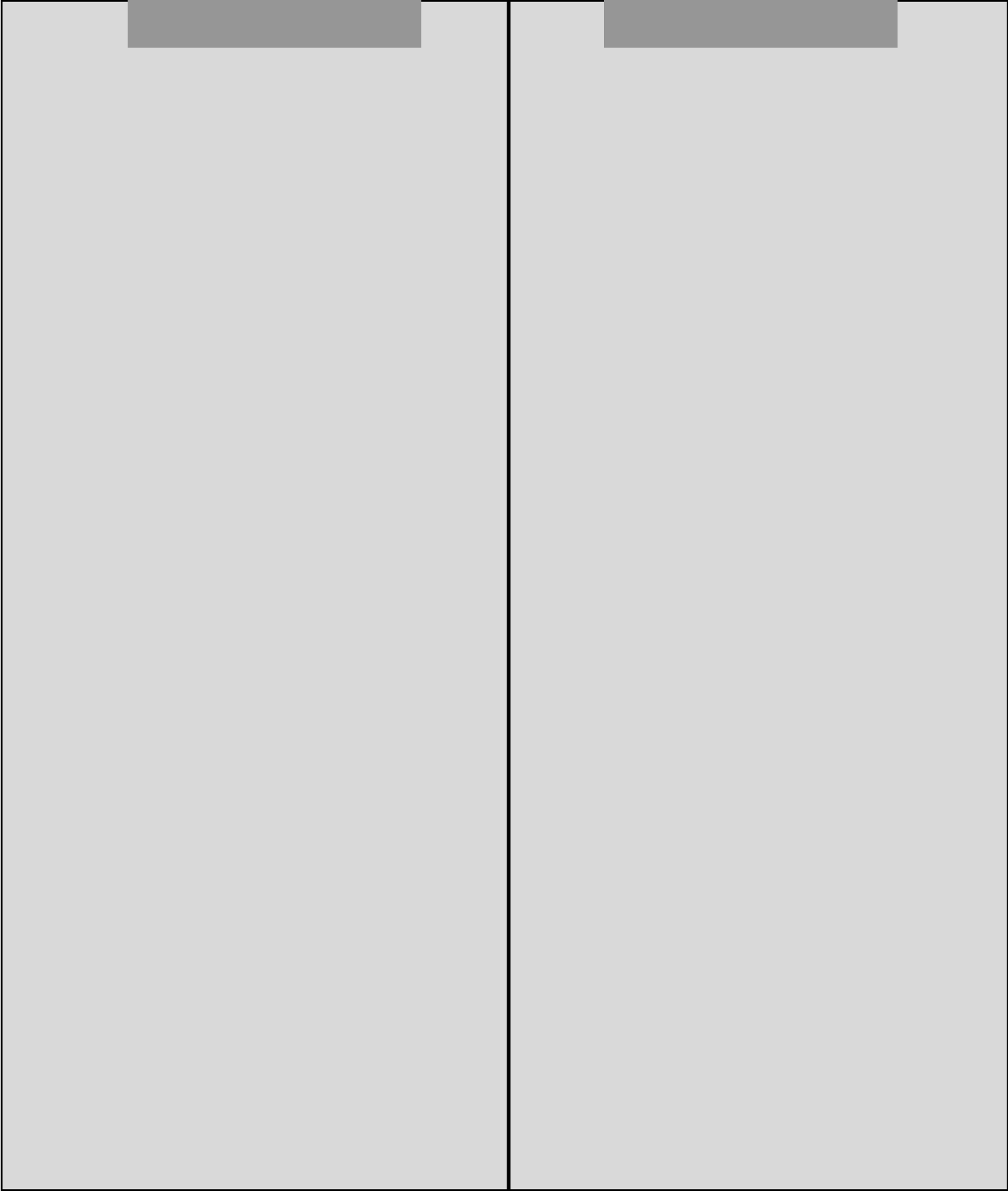
Often the public and businesses want to take action to reduce pollution, but obstacles stand in the way. Government needs to step in with investments—funds for a new rail line or low-interest loans for new technology—to remove these obstacles.

#### ***In Support***

- Market forces are more powerful and more appropriate than command and control mechanisms. Investments remove obstacles that prevent people and businesses from doing things.
- Incentives, paired with investments, encourage people to try something new. They often stick with it.
- Government investment in new technology can help drive down costs and increase the market for these new technologies.

#### ***In Opposition***

- Incentives and investments are usually inadequate. Adequate expenditures are expensive.
- It is naïve to believe that encouragement can replace regulation and mandates for the tough action often required.
- Too often, well-conceived investments turn out to be wasteful government spending.
- Incentives don't replace essential public education about the problem and solving it.



# THE AIR WE BREATHE—APPROACHES TO REDUCING SMOG IN CENTRAL OHIO: an example of a framed issue

## ***The Situation***

The region was growing rapidly. Smog had developed as vehicles and other sources added pollutants to the air. Recent studies showed ozone, the main component of smog, caused significant health problems at lower levels than previously believed. Based on these studies, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed new tougher health-based standards for ozone. Data gathered from 1997-1999 in the Columbus area (central Ohio) showed those ozone levels would violate the proposed standard. In addition to those concerns, there was potential for tighter federal controls that could negatively impact economic development, and if the new standard was not adopted, continued rapid growth might cause air quality to worsen unless harmful emissions were reduced.<sup>i</sup>

Faculty from The Ohio State University with expertise in issue framing and public deliberation worked in a partnership with the Columbus Health Department and the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission. They established Project CLEAR (Community Leadership to Effect Air Emission Reductions), a proactive, community-oriented initiative. Citizens were trained to frame the issue and moderate forums. A grant from the Ohio Environmental Education Fund supported publication of their issue guide, *The Air We Breathe: Approaches to Reducing Smog in Central Ohio*. Four approaches evolved from their framing efforts. Then they went out into the communities to facilitate discussions about the issue, the options, and the preferences regarding strategies to reduce ozone-forming emissions.

## ***Outcomes of the Forums and Public Deliberation***

The citizens wanted complete and quantifiable information about the severity of the air pollution problem and possible strategies for improving the situation. They were concerned that public actions might be employed that could have an inequitable effect on different communities, businesses or populations. They were resistant to the use of a government imposed regulatory approach, and preferred a system of incentives and investments in public infrastructure to encourage voluntary participation in actions that would promote cleaner air. They felt education about smog as a public health problem was essential and that the public should be involved in determining any remedial actions to improve air quality.

A summary of the forums' report stated "when devising a comprehensive public policy, a system of voluntary incentives and investments backed up by mandatory regulation if needed was preferred. Public education should support this policy at every level and would make it more effective."

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<sup>i</sup> The Air We Breathe: Approaches to reducing smog in Central Ohio. Columbus Health Department: Project CLEAR. [www.projectclear.org](http://www.projectclear.org)